**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 23 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE OPTIMISM OF FAITH by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen.*

*Hebrews 11:1*

THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD'S PROGRESS IS THE HISTORY OF the triumphs of faith. Faith, to all human seeming, does the most unwarranted things. It sings in prison. It fights while still in chains. It works without tools. You may put the men of faith into prison, but at midnight you will hear Paul and Silas singing. Sight sings in the morning when it has escaped from prison. Faith sings at night while it is in prison. You may put the man of faith into the dungeon and bind him with chains; but there, without a sword, with no carnal weapon, he will still fight a fight, and win a victory the issue of which will be seen in the days to come. Put the man of faith into circumstances devoid of all the forces upon which the man of sight depends, and he will begin to work, and in the long issues you will discover that his work is that which lasts, that which abides.

The literature of the prison is a wonderful literature, We confine ourselves to Biblical illustrations, and to one that is almost Biblical, Biblical in spirit, The great prophecy of failure and tears breaks out into its sweetest music when Jeremiah sings in prison. Find the central messages of hope, and they are messages which were written while he was in the dungeon. The clearest and most startling visions of God ever granted to the ancient people came to Ezekiel when he was an exile by the banks of the river Chebar. The great epistles of the New Testament were written in prison. Though you take the fisher of the Galilean Sea and banish him to the Isle of Patmos, there he sees through the mists and mysteries to the light and glory of the infinite consummation and the Apocalypse is part of the literature of the prison. If you take the Bedford Tinker and shut him away in the prison house, there Bunyan dreams his celestial dreams and lays the world under a perpetual debt of gratitude to him. Why? Because these men were men of faith. If the test of a word is a work, if the test of a creed is a creation, if the test of a root dry and withered, is fruit luscious and beautiful, then faith is vindicated in the passing of the centuries. The men of faith have found:

Glory begun below

Celestial fruit on earthly ground

From faith and love will grow.

Lo to faith's enlightened sight,

All the mountain flames with light,

Hell is nigh, but God is nigher,

Circling us with hosts of fire.

We may not be able to account for it, but I think no one here will be prepared to contradict the statement, that it is the men of faith who have made the great contributions to the world's progress; always the men of faith. I am not proposing to argue that tonight. My business is of a profounder nature.

I want to ask this simple question. Why is it that faith always triumphs? Why is it that the word of faith materializes into the work that lasts? Why is it that the creed of the man of faith vindicates itself in a creation? Why is it that this root - may I very reverently borrow a word that does not belong here - this "root out of a dry ground," this root which at the present moment is considered by the philosophies of men to be so entirely out of date, why is it that this russet, drab bulb, that seems to have no color and no glory and no light, why is it that it is forevermore breaking through and blossoming into beauty and triumph? Why is faith victorious? The answer is in my text. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen."

Let us first take two phrases from the text in order that in the briefest way possible we may remind ourselves of what they mean; "things hoped for"; "things not seen."

These are the unreal things, the intangible things, the imponderable and unlikely matters; the uncertain things of the future "things hoped for"; the uncertain things of the present, "things not seen." Mark, I pray you, that difference in suggestion. "Things hoped for" are always future. "Things not seen" according to the interpretation of this writer and this letter, are not future but present.

The "things not seen" are in existence now. How are you going to demonstrate them, be sure of them? By faith. The "things hoped for" are future. How are we to be sure of them? By faith. This is the statement not only of the two sides of the great fact, but of a sequence, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for." Why? Because it is the "proving of things not seen." "Assurance of things hoped for" grows out of faith, because faith demonstrates, proves to certainty the "things not seen." "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for," therefore it sings in the midst of the process and in the prison house. Why does it sing? Why is it sure? Because it demonstrates, it proves the unseen things.

"Things hoped for"; these are things that lie ahead of us, things that we have not yet come into possession of, things that according to the philosophy of men and the appearances of the hour, it is improbable we ever shall come into possession of. "Things hoped for," the realization of our own ideals; the ultimate victory of good in the world; compensation for all the travail, the sorrow, and the loss of today; the striking of an even balance in the affairs of men, when justice shall reign supreme. We all sigh for these things; they pass, ever and anon, like a vision before our eyes, and we speak of it as a mirage, a disappointment, and ask, "Can our ideal ever be realized? Will there ever be the ultimate victory of good? Is there to be compensation for the stress and strain and sighing and sorrow of humanity? Will there be a victory of justice?" "Things hoped for" are the things we fain would see if we could.

"Things not seen." Is there anything unseen? Have we not done with reality when we have looked the last upon the things material? We are gathered together in this building; there are real, seen things in this building, light and life; men and women, Is that all? The man of the world says, "That is all you can prove." Faith, according to this writer, proves the unseen thing, not the unseen things that are distant, but that are near. What are the things that faith claims to prove? For the moment, I will not say faith has proved them. What are the things faith claims to prove? God, the spirit world, the hidden forces; angels sweeping up the mountain side that the prophet saw and his servant did not see, the angel ministers watching in Gethsemane, which Jesus saw and the disciples did not see. You say these are the uncertain things which the present age doubts, the unseen things. So much for our phrases. "Things hoped for"; the realization of ideals, the ultimate victory of good, compensation, the even balance and justice; the building of the city of God and the triumph of righteousness. "Things not seen." Oh, if there only were a God, if only there were spiritual forces as well as material forces, if only the dreams of these men of old were true and the mountain flamed with light and angelic hosts; if only these things were real, then we should be quite sure that our dreams would be realized. Fail to believe in things unseen and hope dies, the song is silent, the fight ends, and the work is abandoned. Let the dust of the highway be everything, and the troops will weary upon the march and the territory will never be possessed. Let humanity come to the conclusion that the life of bread and raiment and dust is everything, and thereby is signed the death warrant of all high ideals and aspirations, and of everything noble. There is no assurance of things hoped for unless there be the proving of things unseen.

The writer of this letter declares that "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen."

It is necessary that we take time to understand what this man meant when he wrote that word "faith." This letter to the Hebrews is peculiarly the letter of faith. It is a letter which supremely warns men lest they apostasize from faith in the unseen. From beginning to end, without waiting to turn to actual passages, sin is synonymous with unbelief; the sin that is in good standing around, that is, the sin that is popular, the sin that men never count vulgar, but which is so insidious that it weakens the nerve and dims the vision, and ends the possibility of strife, is unbelief. The master principle of victory is that of faith, the opposite of unbelief. This eleventh chapter, of which my text is but an introductory, explanatory word, deals with that whole subject. In this chapter, the writer makes pass before us the men of the ancient economy who wrought wonders, won victories, and made contributions toward the final consummation, and it was always by faith that they did these things. It is the story of faith.

What is faith? Faith is not merely intellectual conviction of a truth. Faith is more than intellectual conviction of a truth. Let me turn to one or two words here. In the third chapter of this letter, verses twelve to fourteen -

Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God; but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called Today; lest anyone of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin; for we are become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end.

Confidence is the word that I want you to remember there. Store that word in your mind. Pass on to the nineteenth verse, and in close association with it read the eleventh verse of chapter four. "We see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief." "Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience."

Store in your mind the word disobedience. Turn on to chapter six and the twelfth verse - "Be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

From this passage we will store in our memory the thought, not sluggish but patient.

In chapter ten, verse twenty-two - "Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water." The phrase I ask you to store in your memory hence is, "with a true heart."

That is a somewhat wearisome business; but very important, for I hold that it is far more important for us to catch the real significance of the word, according to the mind of the man who wrote it, than that we should speculate about it. In the reading of those verses, my hope is that some of you, my young friends particularly, will go back to read this letter through again and find what faith is. For the purpose of our present study let us observe that faith is not only intellectual conviction; it is that confidence reposed in a statement which produces obedience. I am not sure that faith is always perfect certainty. I am not sure that there may not be living faith which is not intellectual certainty. Faith is that which in the presence of a great statement, puts confidence in it, obeys its suggestiveness, risks something, ventures something upon the declaration in order to discover whether the declaration be true or not. I am growingly convinced that there may be living faith which is not based upon absolute intellectual certainty. I am inclined increasingly to say to men, "You will come to intellectual certainty by the exercise of faith." That is one of the values of my text. Faith is the proving of unseen things. That is the way whereby men find out whether there be a God, whether there be a spiritual world, whether there are forces other than the material. The declaration is made of the existence of God. The declaration is made as to the reality of the spiritual. The declaration is made that there are forces other than those of dust. You say, "I am not sure, my intellect is not entirely convinced; yet I will exercise faith, I will put confidence in the declaration, obey its suggestion; and I will do it with patience and diligence and a true heart. If do that, and there is no answer, I shall have the right to deny the existence of the unseen and banish the hope of ultimate realization." I have no right to begin by denying the existence of the unseen and turning from the hope of the future, on the supposition that they are not. Faith is a risk, a venture, an adventure. That is the word, adventure. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees. What was he doing? Making the great adventure. If there had been newspapers in Ur of the Chaldees, I can imagine the leading article on the morning after he had left - "We regret that our respected fellow-citizen has imagined! " It was a great adventure of faith, and faith was vindicated. What this letter calls men to is the proving of the great declarations of the unseen by stepping out in obedience to what these declarations demand, in order to discover. "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God." Whereas that great word may have many applications - and I have heard many applications made of it, more or less correct - take its first significance. Christ was being criticized, men were denying the authority of His teaching and asking Him whence came His authority and His learning. Did He tell these men, "You must be intellectually convinced before you can be My disciple?" By no means. He said, "Do the thing I tell you, and in the doing of it find out whether it is true or not." This is the perpetual challenge that faces man, and faith is the great adventure. Might I not illustrate it on lower levels? Has anything ever been done in this world save upon the principle of adventure? Would the New World ever have been discovered if there had not been one man fanatical enough to sail and sail until he found it? "Oh," but you say, "It was there." If it had not been there, he could only prove it was not there by the same action. "Unseen things? Oh, they are not there." How do you know? You cannot deny until you have made the great adventure to discover. The testimony of the centuries is that the man who does make the adventure always discovers the unseen things.

When the writer of this letter here says that faith is the proving of things not seen, I want you to notice that he is not saying what I have been saying. He does not say that faith is the adventure. He says that faith is the victorious adventure. He declares that the man of faith demonstrates, proves the things that otherwise are absolutely uncertain. When a man will hear the declaration of the unseen and will square his life to the doctrine of the unseen, refusing to put upon his own personality the measurement of dust; when he will behave as though there were a God and eternity, and a spiritual world; that man shall come at last to certainty of God and certainty of the spiritual world. Faith is the proving of unseen things. One would like to go through this eleventh chapter not so much to tell again the ancient story, as to mark the working of the principle in the case of individual men. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for" - the realization of ideals. Faith is perfectly certain they will be realized. Faith says, "He will perfect that which concerneth me." Faith says, He shall present us faultless before the throne of God. Faith says these things. That is assurance, that is certainty. What is it based upon? He will "perfect that which concerneth me." That is an uncertain quantity. That is taking God for granted. That is the venture of faith. Faith is sure. Why? Because faith has proven the unseen. Faith has discovered God, is sure of God, and when faith is sure of God, faith is sure of the throne, and sure of the spiritual world, and sure of the reality of the things that lie beyond the material.

How am I to prove this to you? I cannot prove it to you. You must prove it for yourselves. While you challenge me to prove to you the reality of the unseen, let me give you a challenge in all earnestness and sincerity. You try to prove to that old woman that there is no God and see how you get on! She has never had more than the bread necessary for the day; her heart has been crushed with bereavement after bereavement; she has laid the sacred dust of loved ones in the grave until she is quite alone. Go to see her one day. Do you not know her? I will introduce you. She is in London. You will find her in every village. Go into her cottage. She will soon talk to you about the loved ones gone, and then suddenly with a light in her eyes that never was on land or sea, she will say, "I shall soon be with them. They will not return to me, but I shall go to them." "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Prove to her that she is wrong! You will not attempt it. You think she is wrong. You have no right to think so, until you have made her adventure, until you also have acted along the same line and have found out by that action of faith whether these things are so or not.

Mark the inter-action between these two statements. The proving of things not seen "is the assurance of things hoped for." Look at verse ten, "He looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." The assurance of the city resulted from the proving of things not seen. You say, This man was very foolish to leave a certain city for an uncertain city, to leave Ur of the Chaldees for some city never seen. Oh, but he was sure of the city. What made him sure? God. Let faith find God and faith sings the song of the city, and comes into fellowship with the future. That figure of the city runs all through the Bible until you get the figure of John in Patmos. He saw a city. Why was he sure of the city? Because he knew God. Why was his vision more detailed and more beautiful and wonderful than that of any other man? Because he had leaned his head upon the bosom of the Son of God incarnate, and had had fellowship with the Father through the Son. His song of the city was a song of the assurance of faith resulting from the proving of the things unseen. The proving of the unseen realities is the assurance of realized ideals. The proving of the unseen God is the assurance of the triumphing God. The proving of the unseen order is the assurance of ultimate compensation for all the strain and stress and sorrow, The proving of the unseen measures and weights is the assurance of the final victory of justice. Take away from me my certainty of God and of the unseen order and of the underlying justice, then I have no hope for the world. My hopes are not in parliaments, or in policies - and how much there is to shake a man if he put his hope there! London, Babylon, center of the world, celebrates the induction of its chief officer with military display and an animal feast that ought to shock civilization. When in the midst of London's poor, we can spend thousands of pounds on a feast such as that, I have no hope when I look at man. Underneath are the forces of eternity. The atmosphere of London is the fire of the ever-present God. The unseen things, men blunder through and never know them. God is not de-throned. He will build His city and bring in His triumph. Faith adventuring in obedience to the conception of the spiritual becomes certain of the spiritual and sings a song of hope on the darkest day that ever dawns.

Mark briefly in a closing word the effects of faith. Here again the chapter is better than anything I can imagine. The effect of faith is obedience; "By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

Let there be in the soul certainty of God, and faith will be obedient in circumstances of contradiction and difficulty.

Not only obedience, but endurance; "By faith he," Moses, "forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible."

Endured, is the word. You say, That is an ancient story and perhaps it is not true. It is true in this house. There are men and women in this house who have done the same thing; they have forsaken Egypt, they are enduring misunderstanding, persecution. How are they doing it? "As seeing Him Who is invisible." Beyond that, the writer goes on with illustrations every one of which one would like to dwell upon. From verse thirty on, he mentions names and then deeds. We will not stay with the names, but listen to the deeds, "Subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens."

Then from the major music of that melody, the writer drops suddenly to the minor melody which has in it more of victory than all the rest.

By faith … women received their dead by a resurrection." You say, That is not so now. I know it is so now. By faith women, the most seriously smitten in the hour of bereavement, wrap their loved ones to their hearts and sing in triumph o'er the tomb. Faith is the victory. It is the inspiration of obedience and strength and might and endurance.

It is the spring of perpetual hope. Through rivers and seas of blood, men make their way onward toward the goal, lay down their life for lives in perpetual darkness of sin, lift their eyes ever toward the eastern sky though no streak of dawn be visible, and are full of exultation and expectation on the darkest day.

There is one other thing to say. Faith proves the unseen things not for itself only but for other men. By your faith you demonstrate the reality of the unseen to the world at large. You bring the unseen things into sight by your faith. By the victory your faith wins, you prove faith and prove the unseen things to the man of the world. By your strength in the hour of your agony, I come to believe in God more perfectly. By the magnificence of your overcoming, by the result of your faith, you demonstrate to me the reality of the things which you profess to believe. You say, God. I am not sure. But when you have ended your saying, I watch your doing; and I see that on the dark day there is light in your eye and a song on your lips, and I say, "You must be right; there is no secret for that triumph other than God." You demonstrate the unseen things by your faith. Faith brings out of your word a work, out of your creed a creation, out of your root, fruit full of beauty and sustenance; and men look on the work and believe the word, observe the creation and accept the creed, gather the fruit and are compelled to believe in the root. By your triumphs in the hour of pain and sorrow and agony, by your strength, by the victory with which you overcome in the pressing battle of life, you make men believe in the God you affirm to be the strength and sustenance of your life. By realization in personal life and conduct of victory, you prove to others the unseen things. Can I not put that in the simplest way possible? I put it so because it may help others. No man can ever persuade me not to believe in God, for this among other reasons. Had I no other reason, this for me would be sufficient to the end of my days. My father and my mother believed in God. Not because they said so did I believe in God, but because of what I saw their belief did for them. You cannot persuade me that they were mistaken. Their faith fastened upon facts, unseen, but facts, and I am trying to live as they lived, and I am demonstrating for myself the reality of the unseen.

So whether it be in the individual life, or in the life of the Church of God, or in the life of the world, faith is the victory. I am inclined to end tonight perhaps on your behalf, but certainly on my own, by saying to the Presence, the unseen Presence, in view of all the battle and all the sorrow and all the difficulties, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief."